

THE
DRAMATIC EXECUTION
OF
AGIS.

Parturiunt Montes, nascetur ridiculus Mus.

HOR.



L O N D O N :

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Bright Legacy
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To the R E A D E R.

A JOURNAL of AGIS.

ON Tuesday the 22d of February, the Tragedy of *Agis* was played for the first Time on *Drury-Lane* Theatre, with riotous Applause on one Side, and just Contempt on the other; it being looked upon as a rank Party-Piece, and quite contrary to the Spirit of the *licensing* Act.

It is certain there was not a Clap throughout, but at Party-Strokes. The one tumultuously huzza'd at, will, upon Examination, appear not over wonderful.

“ All *necessary* Danger must be *risk'd*.”

What old Woman ever doubted it? For if a House be on Fire, and if there be no other Way of escaping from it, than by throwing herself out of a Window, two or three Stories high; she will *risk* the *necessary* Danger.

All *honourable* Danger must be *wooded*,
Would have more of the *Seneca-Tinsel* of Clap-trap Sentiments.

This Piece is powdered over with Gods! Gods! — stuffed with common-Place

interjective Exclamations to Liberty, Patriotism, &c. and strongly peppered with sarcastic Inuendos of Corruption, Bribery, Degeneracy, Cowardice, Venality, &c.

The evoking of the Manes of King *Charles*, and *Oliver Cromwel* (which might be better let to rest in Oblivion) can be of no Service (as to us appeareth) unless meant for an anniversary Performance on the Eve of King *Charles's* Martyrdom.

'Till such Time as we shall have a printed Copy of *Agis*, we cannot enter into a particular Enquiry of its Conduct, which appeared to us in the first Representation very confused. There is an unartful Separation of *Lysander* from his beloved *Euanthe*, in Imitation of that affecting and well prepared one of *Oroonoko*, from *Imoinda*; in which he does not consent to yield up his Sword, 'till after strong Assurances from *Blandford*. It is lugged in here for the Sake of tipping us an Attitude. The Imitation of the famous Speech of *Addison* on the Immortality of the Soul, fell very short, and produced no Effect.

So much in Regard to the Author for the present; who may be said, in quitting the Pulpit for the dramatic Rules of *Aristotle*, to have done like many a Man who has quitted a virtuous Wife, to follow a deceitful Harlot, that lured them to Shame.

In the Point of Acting, our *Roscius* (*si Diis placet*) was very fine, and *attitudinous*! His disguising himself (a *Grecian Chief*) in the Dress

Dress of a modern *Venetian Gondolier* is *Novel* ! But his *Spartan* Manner of Fighting in order to inspire our Officers with Courrage, is inexpressible ! He is a brave Man on the Stage ! a very *Hector* *.

The hauling of poor Mrs. *Cibber* this Way and that, is Tragi-comical, and may make her relapse into her habitual Disease †.

The Cream of this tragic Jest was (for in Pieces defective of real Merit, *shew*, no Matter how foreign and absurd, must be substituted.) 1st. The introducing of a *Popish* Procession made up of *white Friars*, with some other *Moveables* like a Bishop, *des Enfants de Chœur*, Nuns, &c. to sing a few antilyric Lines, and then politely rumping the Audience, proceed slowly in a winding Line to the Bottom of the Stage, contrary to Manners, and the Essence of Tragedy, which latter is all Action and Hurry. 2d. The *ex post Facto*. Funeral of *Agis*—*ex post Facto*, because the Piece is over.

But no Matter for the Impropriety so it produces a funeral Pomp and a Dirge ; in which we are told *Agis* and others have obtained the Freedom of the Skies ; Expression borrowed from the *Freedom* of a *Corporation*, or of a *Play-House*.

During the doleful Ditty *Lysander* and his Companion comfort *Agis's* Mother, and the other Lady with dumb *shew*, and holding smel-

* For a Proof of this, he cut Mr. *Havard* over the Eye in the first Night's Skirmish.

† Which has since been the Case.

ling Bottles to their Noses ; by which kind Application, and the Assistance of Music they seem to cheer up.—

The Prologue and Epilogue are curious each in its Kind ; they are *Tattoos* !

The Contempt of the unbiaſſed Public for this, call it what you will, was turned into national Reſentment, on ſeeing what extraordinary Methods (unprecedented in this Kingdom) were taken to ſupport it ; which gave Riſe to the following Reflections.

All authoritative Recommendation and Glare of Protection, avail but for a while, when true *Genius* is not the Object of them. This Truth the deſpotic Cardinal *Richelieu* experienced often in his partial and bare-faced countenancing Play-Wrights, whoſe Talents were under Mediocrity, in Oppoſition to, and in Prejudice of unbefriended Merit.

His Proſtitution of the Royal Family's Preſence to inforce and carry his Point, made all independent Courtiers look on, and ſpeak with Indignation of ſo derogating as well as ineffectual a Proceeding ; for the revolted Publick maintained its Right, and damned the paltry Productions of his favourite Bardlings ; on which he vainly thought to impreſs the Seal of Immortality.

At the Representations of thoſe contemptible Pieces, the Cardinal uſed to parade every Night in the Stage Boxes with the Princes of the Blood, who were under his abſolute Direction. Nay, he would ſometimes almoſt throw

throw himself over by stretching out Looks of Encouragement to spirit up his dependent, and employed Cabals to support what he patronized.

But the People's Taste, true Genius of *Cornille*, with others of the like Stamp, triumphed over the hireling *French* Academy, influenced Court, and imperious Cardinal ; who successful in most of his other Undertakings shamefully failed in this ; which will ever be the Case in all similar Attempts.

The *Cardinal's* haughty interfering with the Affairs of the Stage, first gave Rise to the indecent Report of his Intimacy with the Queen Mother ; and to the Sneer of the then *beaux Esprits*, " That *Lewis* the XIVth might well " be called the Son of the Church." One of the King of *France's* Titles being that of its eldest Son.

So much for Glare of Protection ; now for authoritative Recommendation. — No Person can have a higher Veneration than we have for the Superior Abilities of *Swift* in all Matters of polite Literature ; the Theatrical only excepted, of which he was a very indifferent Judge as can be proved, not from any futile Essay *, either on Tragedy or Comedy, but by the warm Recommendation of a very flimsy dramatic Piece, which we have seen in his Hand-writing.

Had such powerful Credentials been produced in *London*, they would doubtless have been

* See that of Mr. *David Hume*.

been thought sufficient Grounds for his Compatriots, the Nobles, Gentry, &c. of *Ireland*, to be warmly interested in the Support of the said worthless Performance; thinking their Country's Honour to be concerned therein: During which Intoxication of their Fellow-Subjects, the sober *English* would shrug their Shoulders, and look on such violent Proceedings to be more national than judicious.

There are Mobs of high as well as of Low-Life, to the full as ignorantly implicit; and as headlong to follow any fashionable Leader.—
Qui vult capere, capiat.—

As soon as a printed Copy of *Agis* had been brought to us, we sat down and wrote the following cursory Remarks on its most obvious and glaring Absurdities; for to enter into a minute Scrutiny on all the Solecisms therein against the Rules of the Drama and the *English Syntax*, would amount to a Volume in Twelves; which, it is judged more eligible to avoid, both for the Reader's Sake and our own.

Had this Author read that Part of *Boileau's Art of Poetry* (the best extant) in which he treats of the Drama; he might have observed, that he thererecommends a Caution against chusing Names, either grating to, or not readily caught by the Ears of the Audience: For Instance, *Agessistrata*, *Euxus*, &c. — The more gently flowing *Celimene*, is of tender to be met with in modern Romance, *French* Theatrical Pieces, &c. than in the History of *Lacedæmon*.

T H E



THE
 DRAMATIC EXECUTION
 OF
 A G I S.



WE declare, in Opposition to the Prologue, that we are far from thinking old *England* in that abject and degenerate State, the Writer's eruptive and blotched Fancy would misrepresent her to be. He oracularly informs us,

Then for the Brave the Fair reserv'd her
 Charms,

And scorn'd to clasp a Coward in her Arms.

B

I dare

We dare assert in Behalf of the now *English* Ladies, that is their universal Sentiment at present, tho' they would not perhaps,

“ Sighing, *whisper* in a fond Embrace

“ Remember ! — Death is better than Dis-
“ grace.”

This to be sure is very pretty, may make Fools stare — but Men of Sense will laugh.— We need no *Spartan* Authority to inform us that *Death* is better than *Disgrace* ; and think such Sentiments should be spoke aloud, not *whispered*, unless the Hint be taken from the *whispering* Scene of the Rehearsal. But on a second Thought, it may not perhaps be improper for the *Fair* to *whisper* in a *fond Embrace*, that Death in a Lady's Arms is preferable to the *Disgrace* of *not attacking*, [Now a *Spartan* Mother speaks.]

“ My Son thy Flight *alone* I shall deplore,
“ *Return victorious ! — or return no more !*”

[To which we add for the Triplet's Sake]

This Line reproaches a *Return before*.

How shall we make out the Sense of the first Line which is equivocal. Will she lament *only* her Son's Flight ; or weep it *alone*, that nobody
may

may witness against such human Weakness,
unbecoming a *Spartan* Dame.

“ While Beauty thus with Patriot Zeal combin’d,

“ And round the *lawrell’d* Head the *Myrtle*
twin’d.

This Imagery of intertwining the *Myrtle* with the *Lawrel* around a Hero’s Head, favours too much of Gallantry for *Lacedæmon*; and is quite contrary to the *Costume* of *Sparta*—The Rest of the *Prologue* is to the full as ingenious and sensible. — Now to the *Tragedy*.

Page 2. ——— The *still Whisper* spreads
Thro’ *justling Multitudes* the dread Alarm.

We humbly think that the *justling* of *Multitudes* would prove a great obstacle to the *spreading* of a *Whisper*. Nay, how can a *still Whisper* spread *dread Alarms*?

Alas Revenge ! and Empire now depend
On the wild Issue of unruly War.—

This prodigious Truth has been known in all Times and Climates, even by the Negroes of *Africa*, and wild *Indians* of *North America*.

“ I see that Danger *only whets* the Brave.

This very common Sentiment is starved here thro’ Dearth of Expression. Thus *Quintus Curtius* paints a Hero, *est animi Difficultatibus Obluctantis*.

But yet, *Amphares*, if my Lord is vanquish’d,
Will not the conquering Army awe the City?

Most certainly. It is always the Consequence.

P. 8. The *blackest* Fury of the *Stygian* Realm,
The most destructive is *infernal* Discord,
Bath’d with the Blood of Kings she walks
the World,
And tumbles States and Empires to the
Ground.

These Lines are as emptily rumbling as any of Sir *Richard Blackmore*’s: Instead of *blackest*, *direst* would read better, and mean more*.

* For thus Mr. *Pope* in his *Translation of the Fourth Book of the Iliad*, which has been impotently aped here.

Discord *dire* Sister of the slaughter’ing Power, &c. not *black* Sister; *dire* is derived from two Latin Words, *Decorum Ira*. The Anger of the Gods.

nigerrima Furiarum is laughable. *Stygian* and *Infernal* signify the same Thing, and are here tautologous. To realize this ideal Mis-complication of Horrour, suppose one of our Chimney-sweepers should go into a Slaughter-house, there receive Anointment from the bloody Hands of Butchers; then issue forth, his former Sable all be-crimsoned, and as he grimly walks the Streets, tumble down Casks and Porter-Butts.

Gods and good Men shall witness for the
King,

That he with Fate contended for his People,
And on the Ruins of their Virtue fell.

Falling on the *Ruins* of a People's Virtue may be great; but we do not understand it.

P. 9. I need thee now *Lyfander*! O my Friend!
I *lean* on thee, and thou perhaps art
fallen.

Turn this which Way you will, it is Nonsense.

P. 12. Those they bewail, who die by dire
Disease,
Of Youth and Vigour full.

This

This is said of the *Thracians*. All *Euro-pean* Nations do the same for their *Youth*, who die of *dire* Diseases; but their *Vigour* indeed is commonly exhausted before Death: Matters may have formerly happened otherwise in *Thrace*.

P. 17. Your Words like melancholy Music
take

My list'ning Ear, and cause delusive
sadness,

Past are the *Storms* and *Tempests* of our
Fortune,

Let not *Euanthe* heed the *Rack* of
Clouds,

Nor dread the *Murmurs* of the falling
Main.

Here is a Dashing of Figures, and nimble
Skipping from one to the other.

Versus inopes Rerum, Nugæ-que canoræ. HOR.

Fine sounding Words, but quite devoid of
Meaning.

P. 21. Ne'er were the Good and Bad *winnow'd*
 so well
 And *sever'd* from each other.

Is not an heroic Expression.

" Such oft are those that quit a *needy* Home,

" To serve as *Hirelings* in a *Tyrant's* Host.

Much may be said on those two *Lines*, but
 not very complimentary to our Friends, the
Switzers, &c. or even to the *Scotch* Regiments
 in the *Dutch* Service.

" Next in Command my Brother *Euxus*.

" stands,

" A Youth to *Mars* devoted, for he loves

" Danger *it-self*, not Danger's rich Re-
 ward."

That is he dares, because he dares:—The
Rehearsal again.

What is *Danger's rich Reward*?

P. 23. The *brave* Assertors of the public Cause
 Have ever been too *mild* in *evil* Times.

Instead of *brave* they were very *weak* Asserters.

Have

Have like indulgent Parents spar'd the *Rod*,
And let the *Vices* of their Children *live*
To *kill* the *Virtues* — Hence let *Agis* learn
The only Lesson that his Nature needs.

• This is a noble Instance of throwing a vulgar
Maxim into the Sublime. “ Spare the Rod,
and spoil the Child.” If *Agis* stood in need of
that *Lesson*, he certainly needed many more to
be a complete Prince.

Your great Imagination's *up* in Arms !
This is of the ———— O — ho, Kind !
Without Delay once more *Lyfander* arm,
And *ostentatiously* pass thro' the Gate.

Of-ten-ta-ti-ous-ly is a true Sesequipedalian
Word ; and *Horace* says (whose Judgment we
implicitly rely on in Dramatic Affairs) that
Tragedy rejects all such.

Projicit Ampullas, et sesquipedalia Verba.

P. 24. - - - - - Let never Man
Say in the Morning, that the Day's his
own.

This Caution is useless, because no Man
of Sense, ever has said, or will say so.

Things

Things past belong to Memory alone ;
 Things future are the *Property of Hope*.

When the *Property* of a Thing commences,
 the *Hope* thereof ceases.

The narrow *Line*, the *Isthmus* of these Seas,
 The Instant scarce divifible, is all
 That Mortals have to *stand* on.

To stand on an *Instant* is new. What a
 Confusion of Time and Place is here ; Line,
 Instant, *Isthmus*, &c ? Among the many In-
 stances of this Writer's straining after the false
 Sublime in Sentiment, this is a striking one.

P. 25. Train up the Boy to walk in the same
Path

Which we have trod together, the
 streight *Path*
 Of Virtue and true Glory. If he proves
 Of noble Nature, *and I hope no less*.

What Father does ? This is no great Effort
 for *Agis*, the Mirror of Kings.

C

He

He will not shun the lofty *Path* of Honour,
Tho' Fate should mark it with his Father's
Blood.

A Youth of noble Nature would rather
be animated to pursue, than deterr'd
at the Sight of his Father's Blood. We
have indeed seen many Instances to the con-
trary in a certain Kingdom of late ; perhaps
this is a concealed and political Censure on such
Proceedings.

P. 27. *Xerxes* Lord of great Alarms.

Is a very odd Expression !

---- " They conquered, tho' they died."

So have many Thousands before, and since,
of all victorious Armies.

P. 28. *Amphares* Enemy to *Agis* is made to
blaspheme against *Jupiter*, in order (as we
suppose) to prepare him for *poetical Justice*.

Thus may my *pious* Foes for ever strive,
Be their's the *airy* Aid of *fabled Jove*.

He

He is moreover made a Man of mighty Rhodomontade, which is not *Spartan* in particular ; and not consistent in general with the Character of a deep designing Villain.—This Hyper-Gasconade is put into his Mouth.

----- Many a daring Eye
Looks for the Signal, here it is—my sword—
When I appear thus arm'd—the Furies rise !

Do they so ? Who would not keep clear of such a Man ? How contradictory is it to make him believe in the *Furies*, tho' not in *Jove*. He thus continues the bouncing Panegyric of his Sword.

“ This is the *Comet*, the fierce blazing *Star*,
“ On which, Commotion, Change, and Death
“ attend.”

Here is new a Hint for modern Astronomers, to look on the *Comets* as *Stars* ; which had never been a received Opinion even amongst the Antients.

P. 44. The Soliloquy there is a quaint Straining after something new about the Soul's

Immortality, and terminates in Bombast. It will serve to give every Reader an higher Opinion of *Cato's*.

P. 46. The dangerous Doctrine to encourage Officers to fall off from, and betray the Service they are employed in, is alarming; for no Doubt, such fallacious Arguments have been used by the disaffected in rebellious Times.

Illustres fugite hinc Pueri, latet Anguis in Herbâ.

Illustrious Youths, on whom *Britannia's* Hopes are founded, beware; a Snake lurketh in the Grass.

P. 50. *Amphares* gives a most unmanner'd and insulting Character of the fair Sex, whom we respect too much to transcribe it here. This offensive Grossness, on any other Stage of *Europe*, would have been treated with contemptuous Indignation. If the Author (unhappily for himself) be an *Apathist*, let him bewail his hard Fate, but not traduce the Sex.

P. 56. " Tell me ye inextinguishable Fires
 " That light the Councils of eternal
 " Jove. We

We should be glad to know what these Fires are, that burn for ever on *Jove's Council-Table* — *Sinon's* fine Apostrophe in *Virgil* is very sensible, and can be no Apology here.

*Vos æterni Ignes, et non violabile vestrum,
Testor Numen, &c.*

Here is a pretty familiar Question put to those eternal Fires.

“ Have you since Time began his long Career,

“ Beheld a Mortal like *Lysander tost*.

Tost is very unluckily thrown to the End of the Phrase. We indeed say, a Ship is *tost* to and fro by warring Winds, &c. here it is very low. Besides, if *Lysander* should chance to meet in the other World Don *Quixote's* 'Squire *Sancho*, he will dispute that Point with him.

“ *Euxus* draw near — Upon the *Insect Wing*

“ Of a small Moment *ride* th' eternal Fates.

So do all *Newmarket* Jockeys, Post-Chaise and Stage-Coach Drivers, broad Wheel Carriers, &c. — What laboured Affectation to be nonsensical !

We

We confess ourselves tired of raking in this uninteresting Piece, miscalled a Tragedy ; and think these Specimens sufficient to form an Idea of it. The Epilogue is a flat second Part to the Prologue. In the Play there is neither *Plot*, *Fable*, or *Conduct* ; we are not in an Artist-like Manner informed who the Parties are ; why the late King had been deposed, or for what Exploits *Agis* has been raised ; or how and by what Machinations *Amphares* was able to oppose him. *Sandane* the Queen is an idle Expletive, appears for no Purpose worthy of her Rank. The *Manners* are not characteristic of any Country ; the *Sentiments* are turgid, bombastic, or common Place on Liberty and Patriotism ; many of the last Class are much better expressed in several of our *English* Tragedies, which had we room sufficient, we should have quoted.

The *Diction* besides the above Faults is often dissonant, very mean, fond of monosyllabic Repetitions, as of *Dame*, *Band*, *Stand*, *Land*, *Lord*, *King*, &c. of which (for the Reader's Amusement) an Instance is given in the last Page * : on the Whole it is entirely *Anti-Spartan*, whose Characteristics in Speech were Conciseness, and Brevity. But the misformed *Interlocutors* of those Stage-Dialogues,

logues, are boyishly figurative, declamatory, and sometimes metaphysical. The musical Part is weak as to the Writing, and ridiculous by the Place it comes in, because forced, although quite foreign from the Piece. The former Part is of no Use to the fowarding, but rather retards the main Action, such as it is — the latter is quite a *Hors d'Oeuvre*; in which however is introduced a new Image of *dying Heroes*.

When *Jove* decrees a Nation's Doom,
He *calls* their Heroes to the Tomb.

There are *Houses of Call* in this City where Master-Tailors, &c. are furnished with Journey-men upon any Exigence. This is certainly the first Information of *Jupiter's* having made the Tomb, a House of *Call* for Heroes.

What can be thought of this exquisite mixture of nonsense and vulgarism, page 62.

“ Atone your insolence by prompt Obedience,
“ Or *Death's* your *Portion*.

All Resemblance to the royal *Catastrophe* in this Kingdom, however written, will never fail to affect many Bosoms in a *British* Audience, who inconsiderately set down to the Author's Merit their own Party-feeling, in Behalf of that
unhappy

unhappy Monarch ; while others would act in a quite opposite Extreme, were the Writing ever so masterly, and the Event ever so well prepared, neither of which is the Case here.

The sixth and last Article of Dramatic Representation, to wit, the *Decoration*, is most absurd.

Nunc valeat AGIS, de Eo jam conclamatum est.
The Idol's fall'n, and shames its Worshippers

* Page

- 40 Will thunder in thine Ears: thou and thy Band
42 The Temple is begirt with Thracian Bands
48 To bear my Orders to the Royal Band
50 The Herald is return'd. The Royal Band
53 Some bold Adventurer of the Royal Band
54 My bold Odrysians are a faithful Band
54 — Leaders of the Thracian Band
57 At Midnight to surprize the Royal Band
60 Send forth thy Mandate to the Royal Band
60 ——— No let the Royal Band
66 The Royal Band by Thracian Euxus led.

N. B. We have given here but part of our Author's *Bands* ; the curious Reader will find them and the other Monosyllables mentioned Page 22. interspersed throughout this Piece with equal Propriety and Elegance.

F I N I S.